

“The Walloon language can be saved – but there’s not much time”

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Michel Francard, a distinguished linguistics professor at UCLouvain, thinks the Walloon language can still be saved. However, he warned that the situation has now become urgent when gave an interview to L’Avenir on Saturday. The UN has made 2019 the International Year of Aboriginal Languages, which includes Walloon.

Walloon began to die out when authorities decided to use French as a social ascension tool, Mr Francard explains. There was a “rupture in generational transmission, which poses a threat to languages like Walloon, Picard and Gaumais”, the professor says. He recommends they continue to be taught to protect them. “Not necessarily in schools, but they need to be taught like modern languages, with modern methods”.

Mr Francard thinks something urgently need to be done to stop Walloon languages dying out. He does also urge people to look on the positive side.

He has noticed “a change in mentality: speaking Walloon used to be seen as impolite. It was considered common, low class. Today, young people no longer see Walloon in such a negative way. It is becoming more popular thanks to numerous initiatives that have introduced children to it”.

Mr Francard thinks saving Walloon is still possible. “10% of Walloons today still come into contact with their language in some way. That’s 300,000 people. That’s more than Breton or Corsican. The problem is not critical mass but will and pride”, he says.